



# Evidence to support continuation of the increased WIC Cash Value Benefit for fruits and vegetables

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## PURPOSE

To inform the consideration by Congress of future benefit levels for the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC), this brief summarizes findings from studies conducted by Heluna Health's PHFE-WIC Program and the University of California's Nutrition Policy Institute.

## BACKGROUND

US infants' and children's intake of fruit and vegetables is low, failing to meet the recommendations proposed by the Dietary particularly true for low-income children.

Participation in the WIC — which currently serves about half of babies born in the U.S. — is associated with significantly better food security, diet quality, and developmental outcomes of children. WIC benefits enable purchase of a specific list of healthy foods. In addition, WIC provides a Cash Value Benefit (CVB) with which participants can select and purchase fruit and vegetables.

In May 2021, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Congress authorized the US Department of Agriculture to increase the monthly CVB amount from \$9 for children and \$11 for women to \$25 for children, \$44 for pregnant and postpartum women and \$49 for breastfeeding women. These higher amounts are due to end on September 30, 2023.

## EVIDENCE TO SUPPORT CONTINUATION OF THE INCREASED WIC CASH VALUE BENEFIT



**Increased produce purchases**, including greater variety and higher quality.



**Increased fruit and vegetable consumption**, especially by children whose intakes were initially the lowest.



**Increased food security** for families with limited resources.



**Increased satisfaction**, potentially improving participation and retention in the WIC program.



**Increased sales** for farmers and local retailers.



**1-in-7 participants are unlikely to continue on WIC if the CVB decreases.**



## REFERENCES:

- Ritchie L, Lee D, Felix C, Sallack L, Chauvenet C, Machel G, Whaley SE. **Multi-State WIC Participant Survey: Cash Value Benefit Increase During COVID.** The National WIC Association and Nutrition Policy Institute, University of California Division of Agriculture and Natural Resources. March 2022. <https://s3.amazonaws.com/aws.upl/nwica.org/nwa-multi-state-cvb-report-march-2022.pdf>. Cross-sectional survey of WIC participants in four states and one tribal organization, conducted before and after the CVB increase, focused on changes in children's intake of fruit and vegetables. Two-thirds of participants were satisfied with the higher amount and intake increased by a statistically significant one-third cup per child.
- Yepez CE, Ritchie LD, Anderson CE, Tsai MM, Au LE, Meza M, Whaley SE. **WIC participants support the extension and permanency of the Cash Value Benefit (CVB) for fruits and vegetables.** Public Health Foundation Enterprises (PHFE) WIC program, a Program of Heluna Health, and Nutrition Policy Institute (NPI). September 2022. <https://lawicdata.org/publication/briefs/>. Fifteen structured interviews of Los Angeles County WIC participants revealed that the WIC CVB increase allowed them to purchase more fruit and vegetables of higher quality and variety and helped free up money for other food purchases for their family.
- **Increasing the WIC vegetable and fruit benefits results in large increases to both the amount and variety purchased.** Public Health Foundation Enterprises (PHFE) WIC program, a Program of Heluna Health, and Nutrition Policy Institute. December 2022. <https://lawicdata.org/2023/01/increasing-the-wic-vegetable-and-fruit-benefits-leads-to-more-vegetable-and-fruit-purchases/>. Analysis of the spending habits of a longitudinal sample of over 1500 WIC families living in Southern California showed increases in the average dollar amount spent and the variety of purchased fruits and vegetables after the CVB increased.
- Tsai M, Au L, Ritchie L, Anderson C, Martinez C, Whaley S. **Larger WIC Cash Value Benefit for Vegetables and Fruit Is Associated with Lower Food Insecurity and Improved Participant Satisfaction in WIC Families with Children.** *Curr Dev Nutr* 2022;6(Supplement 1):231. <https://doi.org/10.1093/cdn/nzac048.045>. Longitudinal analysis of data from over 1500 WIC families in Southern California showed a decrease in household food insecurity following the CVB augment.
- Martinez CE, Ritchie LD, Lee DL, Tsai MM., Anderson, CE, Whaley SE. **California WIC Participants Report Favorable Impacts of the COVID-Related Increase to the WIC Cash Value Benefit.** *Int J Env Res Public Health* 2022;19:10604. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph191710604>. Thirty structured phone interviews among WIC participants who were highly satisfied with the benefit increase and purchased and consumed more fruit and vegetables with higher quality and more variety.
- Whaley SE, Anderson CE, Tsai MM, Yepez CE, Ritchie LD, Au LE. **Increased WIC Benefits for Fruits and Vegetables Increases Food Security and Satisfaction Among California Households with Young Children.** *J Acad Nutr Diet* 2023;May 23. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jand.2023.05.018>. Longitudinal survey of 1,770 WIC participants at seven sites in California. With the higher benefit lever, satisfaction with WIC improved, fruit and vegetable intake increased by children with the lowest initial intake, household food insecurity decreased.
- Anderson CE, Au LE, Yepez CE, Ritchie LD, Tsai MM, Whaley SE. **Increased WIC Cash Value Benefit is associated with greater amount and diversity of redeemed fruits and vegetables among participating households.** *Curr Dev Nutr* 2023;August 3. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cdnut.2023.101986>. Analysis of WIC benefit redemption data for 1700 WIC families living in Southern California showed the increased CVB resulted in greater amount and diversity of redeemed fruits and vegetables.

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